



Creating a Research & Learning Center at Eckley Miners' Village

Left: University of Maryland archaeologists document an 1890 outbuilding at Eckley during a 2015 research project. Right: The 1861 Asa Foster House, intended location of Eckley's planned Research & Learning Center.

The Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC) has received a \$48,400 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to design a **place-based, interdisciplinary Research & Learning Center** at Eckley Miners' Village. We welcome your support in fostering collaborative inquiry, educational opportunity, and social engagement at this first-of-its-kind intellectual incubator.

Called an "innovative" and "visionary endeavor" by NEH referees, the Center will serve as a laboratory and idea exchange for researchers investigating Northeastern Pennsylvania's anthracite region. The Center will become **the focal point for an ongoing renaissance of interest** in the region by fostering discussion across disciplinary lines, embedding scholars in the human and natural worlds that they study, facilitating technology-based economic development, and engaging the general public with emerging research.

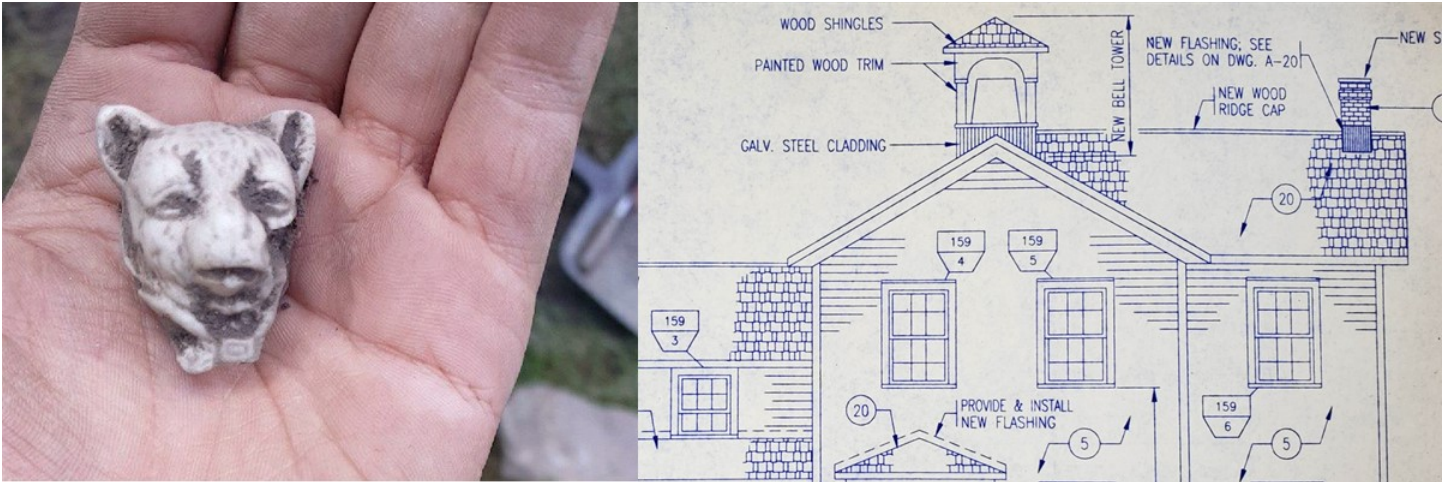


Left: A rocking horse children's toy recovered by a University of Maryland-led archaeological excavation. Right: A Hazleton-area high-school student assists UMD archaeologists in processing artifacts.

Small Town, Big Questions

Eckley is a 19th-century anthracite coal mining company town, National Register-listed historic district, and one of the oldest open-air mining museums in the United States. For more than fifty years, PHMC has preserved Eckley in order to interpret the lifeways of anthracite mining families, the transformation of the region's natural landscapes and built environment, and the evolution of regional culture. Annually Eckley attracts more than 10,000 visitors for its tours, programs, and events.

PHMC is implementing a long-range plan to increase utilization of Eckley’s historic buildings, sharpen its interpretive lenses, and broaden its audience. The Research & Learning Center will leverage the shared strength of nearby universities to engender horizontal, interdisciplinary thinking about the region’s most vexing issues — past, present, and future. Scholars have recently reframed the anthracite fields as a “sentinel land” that, like the canaries and other sentinel species that once alerted miners to impending hazards, prefigure challenges and opportunities approaching other regions of the United States. Eckley’s story and that of the greater coal region is at once geological, geographical, social, and ecological. Research conducted on site or nearby might illuminate **critical minerals production and processing, energy studies, demographic change, rural development, and mineland reclamation**. Our object is to cultivate a setting where these multiple lines of inquiry can mutually inform and flourish.



Left: A cat figurine recovered by a University of Maryland-led archaeological excavation.
Right: Blueprints for stabilization work completed on the Foster House, c. 2004-2010.

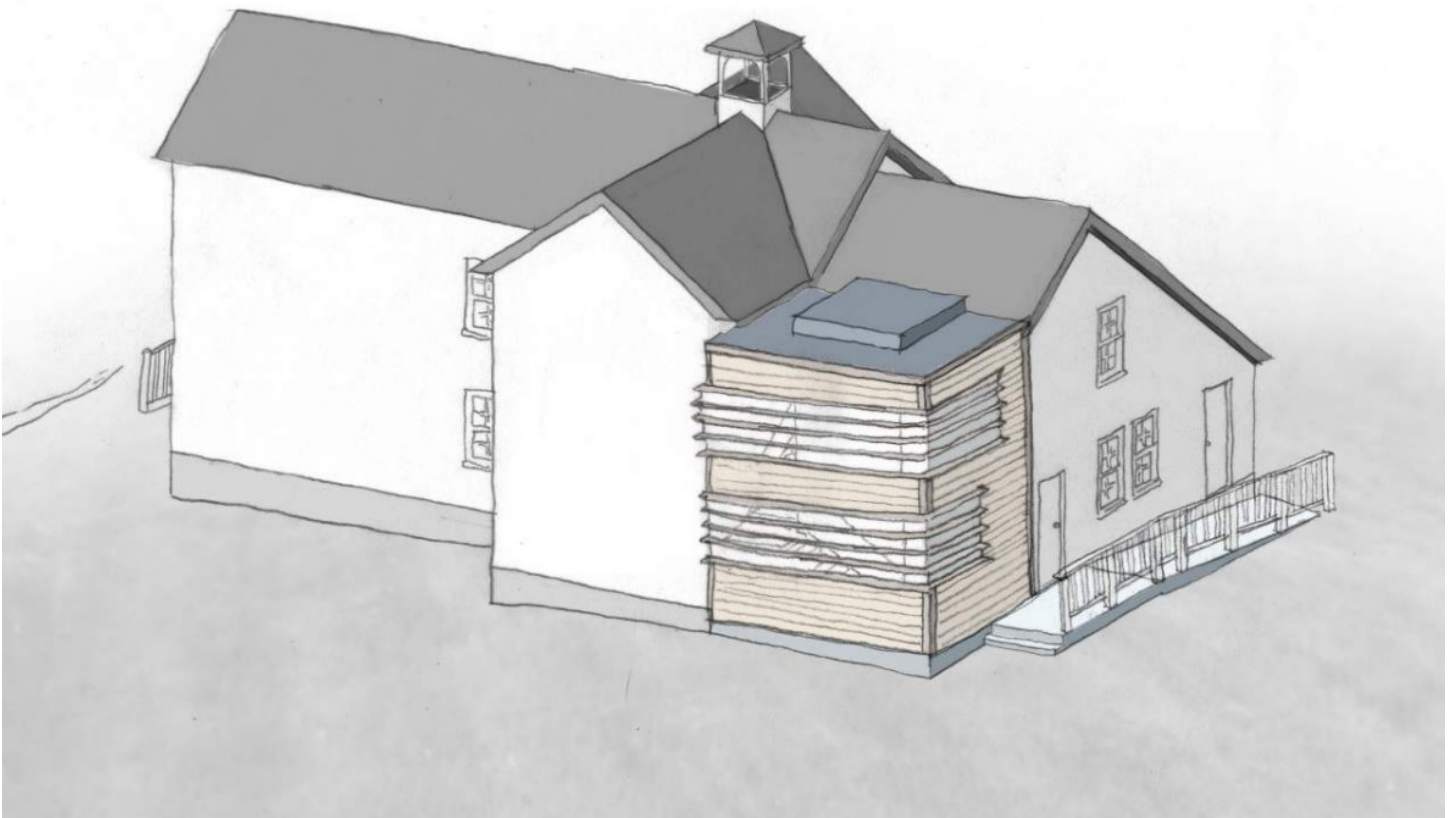
The Center will be housed in the 1861 home of Eckley co-founder Asa Lansford Foster, a geologist, mine engineer, inventor, and publisher whose prodigious intellectual appetite sets a template for future research activities at Eckley. When complete, the 2,500 square-foot Research & Learning Center will boast **swipe-card access, a ventilated wet lab, seminar and conference space, office workstations, climate-controlled storage, and individual lockers**. An addition will be constructed to supply elevator access to the building’s second floor and a second egress. Two-hundred yards away, several historic homes will be renovated to provide overnight lodging for 20+ researchers, supporting embedded scholarly work including field schools and scholars-in-residence.

The co-creative spaces and community orientation of Eckley’s Research & Learning Center will help to erode disciplinary siloes and town-and-gown divides, cross-pollinate academic research, and facilitate sustained engagement with the people and places of the coal region. As project advisor and Marywood University Professor of English Bill Conlogue has observed, “If people are serious about reimagining this place, its inhabitants ... need to know how the place came to be as it is now.” This means attending “closely to the flora and fauna of [the] region, learn[ing] its natural and cultural history, and study[ing] its social and economic problems.” The Eckley Research & Learning Center will serve as a nexus where these varied intellectual sightlines will be focused and their intersections, explored.

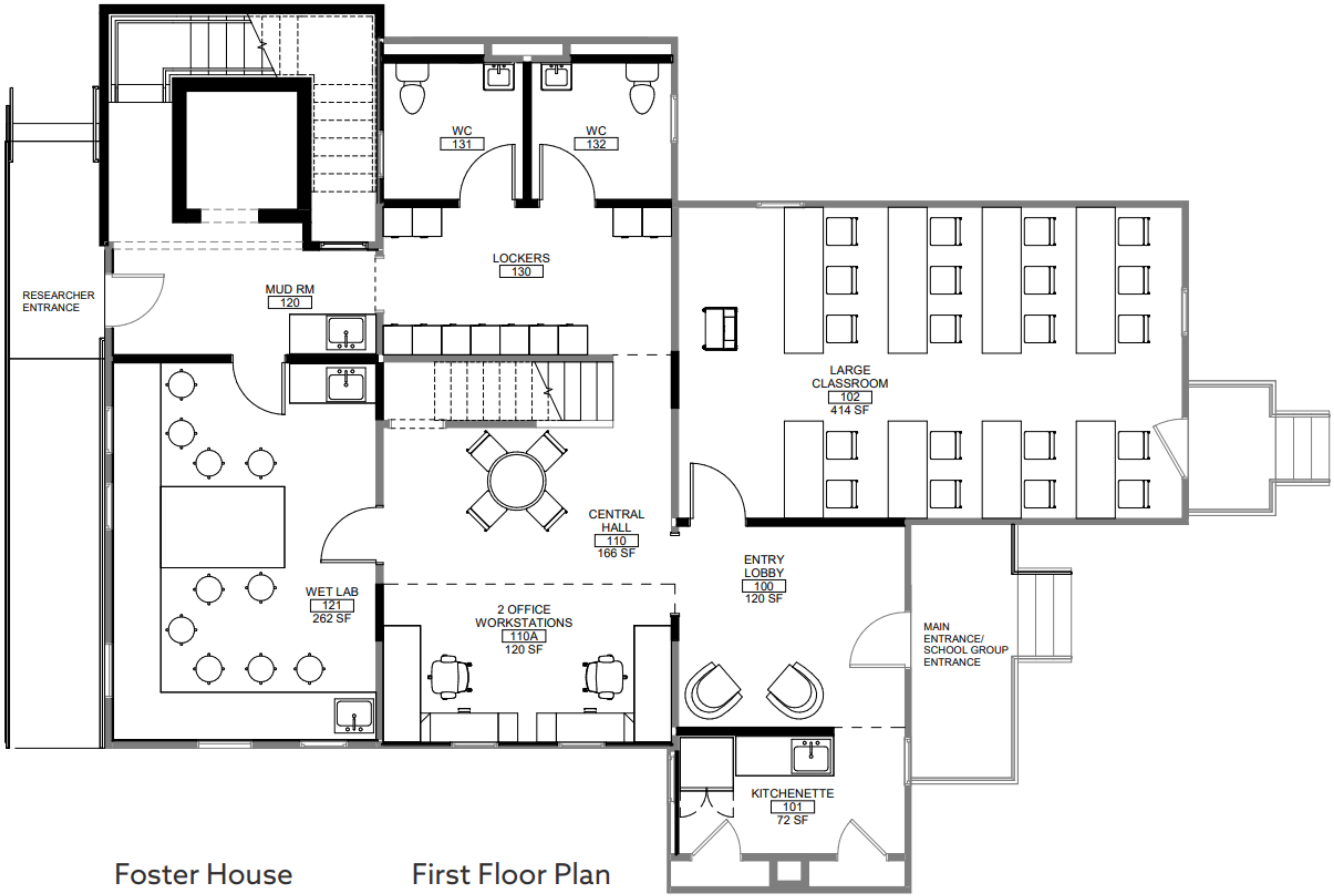
The National Endowment for the Humanities has pledged to double the impact of non-federal gifts by awarding Eckley a dollar-for-dollar match for funds raised to support the Research & Learning Center through Spring 2024. We hope that you will join us in setting **a new standard for interdisciplinary research, knowledge-driven development, and engaged scholarship**.

To learn more about Eckley's Research & Learning Center, please contact:

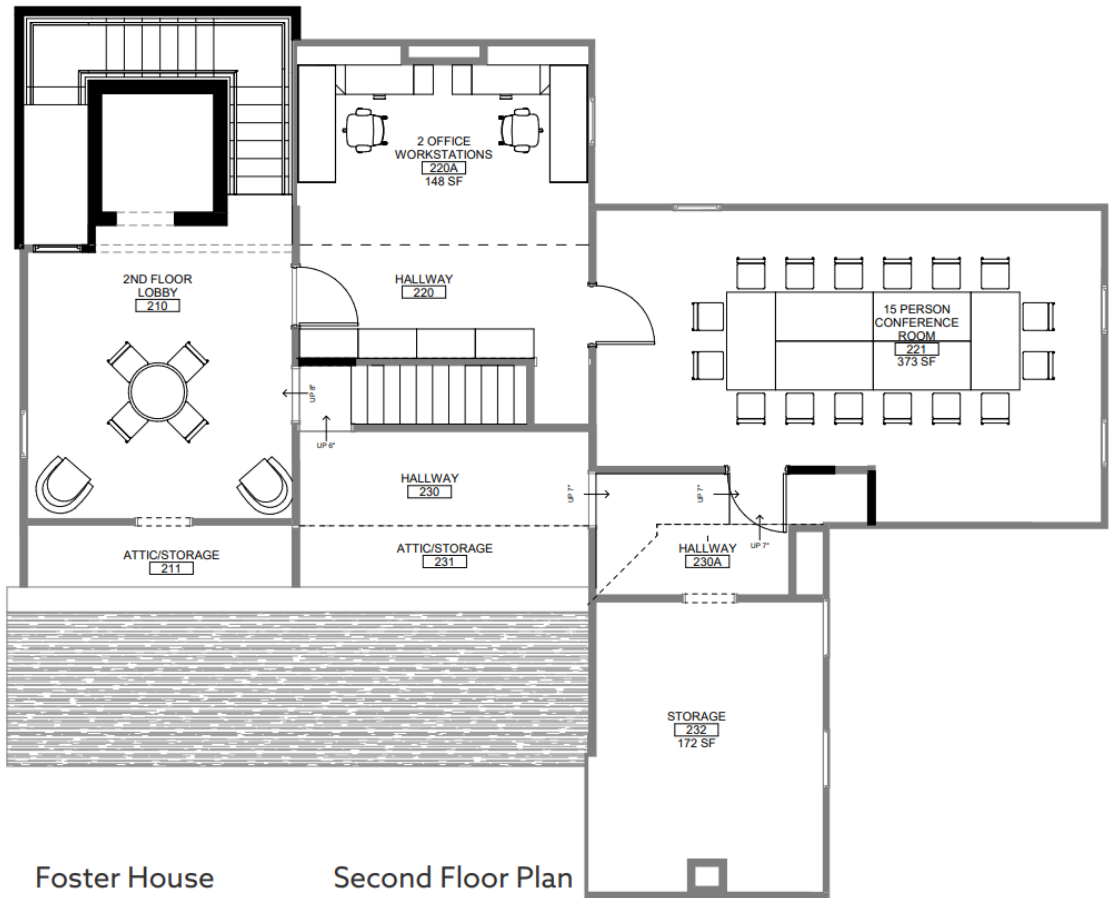
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Foster House rendering with accessibility tower addition.



Foster House First Floor Plan



Foster House Second Floor Plan